

ABOUT TOURIST SATISFACTION IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Establishing market relations in a post-Soviet Countries is accompanied by many challenges. Therefore, conducting research, studying the market, as well as sharing advanced experiences, are of great importance. The article discusses several marketing issues in the tourism and hospitality business. The author's discussion focuses on changing environmental factors. It is noted that in the post-COVID period, the Georgian tourism and hospitality business operates under conditions of increased demand for their services. Various conditions necessary for their effective functioning play an important role in the success of tourism enterprises. In sustainable development tourism has an important place. Sustainable development is a philosophy that can bring great benefits to a country and its people. However, its implementation in real life is difficult and associated with many issues and problems. The modern concept of marketing, known as socio-ethical marketing, recognizes the principles of sustainable development and, at the same time, the need to satisfy the needs of consumers. The author believes that adherence to recognized marketing approaches and principles will play an important role in creating satisfaction of tourists, their further interest. Satisfied visitors leave their positive reviews, which affects the growth of the tourist flow. The development of the tourism sector needs a strong infrastructural basis. The author believes that the development process of this industry should be closely related to the aspects of environmental safety protection and the introduction of sustainable development principles. Therefore, it is important to plan it in advance wisely. Also, based on the analysis of the current situation in the field of marketing environment, it was determined that it is necessary to pay more attention to the targeted approach. The author provides a number of recommendations, including the idea of promoting the development of agrotourism in Georgia, which could be very effective.

Keywords: sustainable development, tourism and hospitality marketing, sustainable tourism, tourist satisfaction.

JEL Classification: M30, M31, M310

1. Introduction

In today's competitive environment, smart companies and their marketers are trying to adapt well to the changing marketing environment. Moreover, some companies have started to take care of society as a whole and the natural environment. They already have a good understanding of the modern challenges and problems, and the roles facing the whole world. Such companies define their role in the formation of social responsibility. Similar problems face one of the popular areas of business, such as tourism and hospitality.

Tourism is not a new direction for Georgia, which has been known as an attractive tourist destination in the past. Even during the existence

of the Soviet Union, many tourists came to Georgia (Seturi, 2018). It should also be noted, that today tourism is one of the priority directions for Georgia. In recent years, the economic importance of tourism in the country is growing more and more, which is confirmed by a number of statistical data (Abesadze, Kinkladze, Paresashvili, 2019; Seturi, 2017). Obviously, this poses many challenges to enterprises and organizations working in this field. Many scientific studies on the mentioned problem have been conducted in Georgia (Todua, Urotadze, 2023; Todua, 2019; Todua, 2017; Todua, Jashi, 2016; Mghebrishvili, 2020; Khokhobaia, Gugushvili, 2021; Gagnidze, 2014; Lekashvili, Dodashvili, 2017).

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It is believed that the development of tourism in the country will contribute to the growth of the economy, additional foreign exchange earnings, reduce the level of unemployment and promote the promotion of Georgian traditions and historical-cultural values (Kharaisvili, Gechbaia, 2017; Koblianidze, Sachaleli, 2020; Seturi, 2018; Ukleba, 2017).

The development of tourism has a positive impact on various sectors, such as: transport and communication, construction, agriculture, production of consumer goods and others. The main form of marketing offer in the tourist market is the tourist product, which is presented in the form of a complex of various tourist services and is aimed at satisfying the wishes of the tourist. But large tourist flows in the country have both positive results and certain risks. Therefore, the introduction of the principles of sustainable development has gained great importance and relevance.

2. Methodology

In the research process we used secondary data. We studied Georgian and foreign scientific works, analytical reports, information on the websites of certain Georgian organizations, data of the National Statistics Office. We analyzed the past situation and studied the current situation.

3. Literature Review

In modern conditions, one of the new approaches for companies has become a socio-ethical concept. However, not all marketers follow the socio-ethical marketing concept. In fact, some companies use questionable practices. Meeting the needs of customers must be done in such a way, that we do not harm society and future generations. Sustainability now tops many corporate agendas. Major corporations outline in great detail how they are trying to improve the long-term impact of their actions on communities and the environment. As one sustainability consultant put it: "There is a triple bottom line: people, planet and profit. The people part of the equation has to come first." (Kotler, Keller, 2015)

With a marketing approach, all directions and efforts should have their own goals. And the Sustainable Development Goals must be linked to all aspects of society. Marketing itself has become

focused on sustainability issues. Organizations use social marketing, ethical and environmental marketing and corporate social responsibility in their marketing strategies and programs. However, the relationship between marketing and sustainability can be controversial, as traditional marketing strategies lead to overconsumption (Popescu, Catalin & Ionescu, Razvan & Gigauri, Iza., 2023; Martin Cervantes, Martínez, Gigauri, 2022).

Halisçelik and Soytaş note that, the advancement of well-being of the citizens should be in an inclusive and sustainable way. In this respect, the sustainable welfare targets should exclusively include three main pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection (Halisçelik, Ergül & Soytaş, Mehmet, 2019).

Sustainable development is very important to maintain the attractiveness of tourist destinations. People should also understand the great importance and relevance of this issue. But, unfortunately, the low level of environmental awareness of the population prevents the increase of public involvement in this process and the implementation of public control in this way (Jashi, 2018). Caring for the environment should not remain mere words, concrete activities are needed in this direction.

That is why it is of crucial importance to disseminate information and educate the population in this direction. For sustainable development, political and technological decisions, financial opportunities, as well as the organization and operation of the education system are necessary. Moreover, environmental issues should become part of the educational programs of pre-school institutions, schools, colleges and higher educational institutions (Gagnidze, 2018).

Today, ensuring the satisfaction of tourists has a great impact on creating and maintaining a positive image of a tourist destination. The study of the mentioned issue is one of the most important for enterprises in this field. Factors that influence overall visitor satisfaction are cost of stay, hospitality, accessibility of attractions as well as infrastructure (Suthathip, Suanmali, 2014).

Tourism destinations and service providers should pay more attention to customer satisfaction in today's rapidly evolving competitive landscape

driven by the latest consumer and technological trends. This makes customer satisfaction more important than ever. Tourists are more experienced, have higher expectations, demand more personalized services and expect more flexibility in service offerings. Search engines and booking sites provide information and price transparency, empowering consumers. The rapid growth of sharing platforms is challenging the conventional business model and providing greater competition to traditional service providers (Wang, Alaei, 2016).

A number of factors significantly influence the overall satisfaction of tourists. Tourists' overall satisfaction varies significantly based on some controlling factors, namely demographic characteristics, cultural characteristics, travel behavior characteristics, and information source (Rafat, 2012). Satisfied tourists tend to share their positive experience with others and repeat their visit. An interesting question is to identify the relationship that exists between tourist motivation, the activities carried out while at the destination and their overall satisfaction level (Armario, 2008).

Availability of affordable prices for tourism products and services has a great impact on tourist satisfaction. More specifically, the cost of accommodation and transportation should be low, and the price should match the quality (Mai, Pham, 2015).

In the context of sustainable development, it is believed that development should be economically viable, socially just and environmentally friendly. The future development of tourism is impossible without a careful attitude towards the environment, cultural monuments, without rational use of resources. Tourism was characterized by a fairly high rate of development in the pre-pandemic years in Georgia. Many factors have contributed to the development of the tourism sector in Georgia.

As for sustainability ratings, they exist, but there is no consistent agreement about what metrics are appropriate. It should be noted that Parris and Kates concluded that there are no indicator sets that are universally accepted, backed by compelling theory, rigorous data collection and analysis, and influential in policy. This is due to the ambiguity of sustainable development, the plurality of purposes in characterizing and measuring sustainable development, and the

confusion of terminology, data, and methods of measurement. A major step in reducing such confusion would be the acceptance of distinctions in terminology, data, and methods (Parris, Kates, 2003).

In the opinion of Hak, Janoušková and Moldan, indicators of varied quality (in terms of the fulfillment of certain criteria) have been proposed to assess sustainable development. Despite the fact that there is plenty of theoretical work on quality standards for indicators, in practice users cannot often be sure how adequately the indicators measure the monitored phenomena. Therefore, they stress the need to operationalize the Sustainable Development Goals' targets and evaluate the indicators' relevance, the characteristic of utmost importance among the indicators' quality traits (Hak, Tomas & Janoušková, Svatava & Moldan, Bedřich, 2015). Other authors attempted to establish a synthetic measure of the level of sustainable development taking into account simultaneously three components: economic, social and environmental (Grzebyk, Mariola & Stec, Małgorzata, 2015).

The natural environment is one of the important factors that cause travelers to be interested in a particular destination. However, changes are underway in this environment. Biodiversity is decreasing, but the governments of several countries pay great attention to the protection of the natural environment from adverse impact factors.

One comprehensive study used 11 factors to evaluate and assemble a list of the Top 100 Sustainable Corporations in the World: energy, water, CO₂, and waste productivity; leadership diversity; CEO-to-average-worker pay; taxes paid; sustainability leadership; sustainability pay link; innovation capacity; and transparency (Kotler, Keller, 2015).

According to some authors, agro tourism is one of the best ways to employ the population in rural areas throughout the year. In regard of sustainable development, interesting studies have been conducted by scientists (Lane, 2009; Millán, Arjona, Amador, 2014). For example, for Spain, olive oil and olive cultivation are a symbol of its culture and gastronomy. However, in rural areas where olives are the main source of income for local families, oleo tourism is gaining popularity with its culinary tourism aspect. This can be considered as a sustainable rural tourism initiative.

It is necessary to have certain objective conditions in the tourist destination, such as a natural-climatic environment, favorable for the rest and health of the population, historical monuments, relevant infrastructure. Georgia has a number of conditions to be an attractive country in terms of tourism. In Georgia, tourists have the opportunity to visit not only the beautiful nature and landscapes.

It is true that the tourism industry has been one of the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. But in the framework of the anti-crisis plan, a number of measures were implemented by the Georgian government to support and restore the affected tourism sector (Government of Georgia, 2021). In the post-COVID period, Georgian tourism and hospitality businesses are operating under conditions of increased demand for their services. For example, in 2024, Georgia hosted a record number of tourist visits, reaching 5.1 million, which represents a 9% increase compared to the previous year. When compared to 2019, the number of tourist visits showed a slight increase of 0.2%. A total of 7,368,149 international travelers visited Georgia in 2024, marking a 4.2% increase over 2023. Compared to 2019, this figure reflects a significant rise of 78.7% (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia). In 2024, travel (tourism) receipts reached a record high of \$4,425.4 million, up 7.3% from the previous year (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia). The fact that Georgia is one of the popular destinations in terms of tourism, this was facilitated by the active stimulating and informational marketing campaigns of the country's government (Seturi, 2018).

With the development of tourism are associated Risks. For example, the development of travel and tourism can be accompanied by environmental risks. The impact of tourism on the environment can be direct and indirect, as well as positive and negative. Tourism cannot develop without interaction with the environment, but through targeted planning of its development, negative consequences can be reduced and positive consequences can be increased (Kordzaia, 2016).

In terms of sustainable development, Georgia has a number of problems, so, for example, in the Adjara region (one of the fastest growing industries in Georgia). Resorts here attract

visitors with their seaside locations, historical and cultural monuments, cuisine, national parks, state reserves and rich biodiversity. The main risk is related to inappropriate urban zoning regulations and increasing construction activity in settlements in the very southern part of the coast of Georgia. Most of the newly built hotels are located in the immediate vicinity of the beach, some only 50-100 meters from the beach, which is dangerous. Tourism infrastructure faces a number of threats from climate change and extreme events such as street flooding and flooding in coastal communities; interruption of electricity supply and consequent failure of cooling systems during the summer months; Damage to roads connecting tourist destinations and others (The World Bank). Obviously, all such and other risks are directly related to the safety and comfort of tourists.

Sustainable development faces obstacles not only in Georgia, but also in Europe (Redek, Domadenik, Koman, 2020; The European Environment Agency) and in other countries too. Although there can be visible a gradual convergence of EU-member states in respect of their levels of sustainable development, nevertheless majority of countries still post indicators of sustainable development below the EU average, especially those which recently became members of the European Union (Grzebyk, Mariola & Stec, Małgorzata, 2015). Due to enormous socio-economic and lifestyle changes, land abandonment is widespread and increasing. At the same time, there is strong growth in nature-based tourism.

Activity in the direction of sustainable development has become an important issue today. Especially since Georgia has signed the Association Agreement with the European Union in order to promote political association and economic integration in this union. The agreement envisages the increase of Georgia's involvement in EU strategies, programs and organizations (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia).

Engagement in the direction of sustainable development has started in Georgia. In the basic data and directions document of the Government of Georgia, we read that the priority is to create jobs and overcome poverty. In terms of employment, the key issue is the promotion of business as the main generator of jobs (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia).

4. Findings

Effective and profitable operation of tourism is important for the development of the country. There are significant positive changes in the use of marketing approaches, but not enough yet. The increase in the number of tourists does not yet mean its highly profitable operation. Not enough attention is paid to identifying the needs of the segment and preparing special marketing proposals for each of them. Tourists' satisfaction is determined by several different factors at the same time. Unfortunately, the services available at various service facilities are weak.

The goal of sustainable tourism development should be to reduce the resistance caused by the complex interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the host community. The current situation in the Georgian capital in terms of sustainable development is not easy. Which was caused by various reasons: many refugees from other countries, the arrival of a large part of the rural population to live in the capital, etc. There are big problems with parking cars, there are traffic jams on the roads, etc. All this creates uncomfortable conditions for both the local population and visitors, which clearly affects their satisfaction.

Thus, sustainable development is not an easily understood phenomenon. Because it is related to many issues, aspects and indicators. And its provision and implementation require large costs. How to ensure this? which is a problematic issue. Nevertheless, if there is a great desire and aspiration in the direction of sustainable development in the country, some rational approaches will definitely be found.

5. Conclusions

In the future, tourist satisfaction will be even more closely related to the sustainable development of this industry. Its implementation will help to avoid conflicts between the given industry, the visitors, the ecological environment and the population of the tourist destination. In order to ensure the attractiveness and satisfaction of tourist destinations in the context of sustainable development, we believe that the main emphasis should be placed on the successful implementation of the following issues:

- We consider it expedient to encourage domestic tourism and promote the development of agro tourism. The latter can be very effective for Georgia, which was traditionally known as an agricultural country;
- The development of the tourism sector should be closely related to the aspects of environmental safety and cleanliness. And its planning should be done wisely and in advance together with specialists in this field;
- The use of targeted marketing by enterprises in the tourism industry, which will take into account the offer of high-quality services in order to attract more high-spending tourists to the country;
- Support from the state for the protection of the rights of employees in the field of tourism and hospitality and the implementation of an effective professional education policy. This will increase the motivation of the staff;
- It is an important issue to raise the awareness of the population about the positive impact of tourism development on their employment and raising the standard of living, which requires the inclusion of information channels in this direction.

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